



A Guide for Conducting Professional Interviews

An internal guide for hiring managers to conduct professional
and non-discriminatory interviews.

A Guide for the Interview Process

PURPOSE:

This guide is intended to be a reference manual for managers to use when conducting new hire and promotional interviews. It is structured such that managers will understand the process flow from the point of identifying the need for a position to completion of the hire/promotion package. The information contained in this document covers many of the critical elements for an effective and nondiscriminatory employment interview.

INTERVIEWER RESPONSIBILITIES:

As a manager conducting an employment interview, your responsibility is to evaluate the qualifications of applicants and make employment selections on the basis of job related criteria only. In addition, the interview process must be conducted in accordance with legal requirements as outlined in this guide.

GOAL:

This guide will assist managers in applying nondiscriminatory techniques of selection interviewing and provide guidance to managers relative to interviewing practices that comply with the principles of Equal Employment Opportunity.

THE GOLDEN LEGAL RULE

Have a legitimate business reason to support any questions asked of job candidates or any job requirements that are established. Keep all inquiries and requirements job related!

No conversation during the interview is "off the record." Be careful of "small talk", even that of individuals not directly involved in the interview process. For example, receptionists and intake individuals should not discuss personal matters or ask any illegal questions, similar to those outlined in this document, with individuals waiting for their interview.

Consistency in interviewing applicants is essential and all interviews must be conducted so as to learn about a candidate's job-related skills, experiences and qualifications.

Part 1 – The Beginning

Once the need to fill a position has been identified and authorized, the Affirmative Action Office becomes involved in the process and works closely with the Shared Services Manager and hiring manager through completion of the process.

Upon authorization to fill a position, a job posting must be drafted. The EEO/AA Officer shall review the proposed role description. This review is necessitated by ADA requirements and is designed to ensure that the essential functions of the position are clearly stated and are, in fact, essential to performing the job.

A vacancy may be limited to eligible DOP employees upon agreement of the Division Director, the Shared Services Manager and the EEO/AA Officer. Securing opportunities for existing employees is paramount, but there may be occasions when the potential applicant pool does not appear to offer hiring managers enough applicants from which to select the best-suited candidate. In such cases, the Officer may recommend that the position be posted externally as well.

When filling a position announced as Open/Competitive, if it appears the potential applicant pool will not yield a diverse group of candidates from which to select, the Officer will undertake special recruitment efforts to improve the applicant pool.

Part 2 – Before the Interview

The Shared Services Manager receives all resumes submitted in response to a posting and reviews them to ensure that the potential applicants meet the minimum qualifications of the position. When the closing date for the posting has been reached, the Shared Services Manager shall advise the Officer so that the resumes can be preliminarily reviewed by the Officer. The Officer shall complete the preliminary review of the applicant pool within five working days of the closing date of the posting.

A. The Screening and Review Process

- Those candidates who do not meet the minimum qualifications of the position as well as those who are ineligible shall be removed from consideration and listed alphabetically on the Applicant Flow Data Form (Appendix 1) as not interviewed, with the appropriate reason indicated. The Shared Services Center is responsible for sending an applicable notification to the rejected candidates.
- All candidates who do not respond by the cut-off date shall be added to the Applicant Flow Data Form with an appropriate comment. The postmark date shall take precedence over the date of receipt. In the event the hiring manager wishes to interview an applicant who submitted his/her resume late, then the hiring manager

will be required to interview **all eligible** applicants who submitted their resume late for fairness and consistency in treatment purposes.

- The Shared Services Center shall place all minimally qualified respondents in a potential applicant pool for further evaluation and comparison by the hiring manager. No minimum number of responses need be received for the screening/interview process to begin; however, the organizational goal of a diverse and representative applicant pool shall not be overlooked. Accordingly, in hiring units where significant underrepresentation exists, when feasible, the Officer may request that the position not be filled until a diverse and representative group of people have been considered.
- The hiring manager shall develop uniform screening criteria for the respective position which shall be reviewed, and agreed to, by the Officer. Screening criteria shall be related to the duties and responsibilities of the position and the operational needs of the hiring unit. Screening criteria may also include EEO/AA goals when it is deemed that additional emphasis needs to be placed in this area. Such cases will be identified in the EEO and Workforce Development Plan covering the current fiscal year.

The criteria used in promotional considerations shall include all of the employee's job-related work experience, education and professional certification/credentials, and the employee's work history at DOP or another state agency.

- Candidates not selected for interviews shall be added on the Applicant Flow Data Form with the comment "not best matched to the interview criteria." Letters shall not be sent to these candidates until all interviews are conducted and a candidate has been recommended for hire.

B. Plan the Interview

- Job analysis. Analyze the job before you begin interviews.
- Identify required knowledge. What skills and abilities are necessary or will be used in the position? Identify the core competencies required to successfully fill the position. Advise the EEO/AA Office in writing.
- Lay out a written plan. Decide on a rating scale and the selection criteria. Submit the rating scale and selection criteria to the EEO/AA Office.
- Plan and write out your introduction. Remember, you may need to vary the introduction based on whether the applicant is internal or external.

- Develop the interview questions. Submit your core interview questions to the EEO/AA Office for review prior to conducting the interviews. Remember that questions should be open-ended to elicit maximum information about the applicant. A variety of sample questions that focus on determining how the applicant feels about his/her current or past positions; about the applicant's relationships with people; questions designed to explore the applicant's aspirations; questions designed to stimulate the applicant to self-assess; and, questions to determine how the applicant would apply his/her skills, experiences and knowledge comprise Appendix 2. Remember that all applicants for a given position must be asked the same questions to ensure consistency in the process.
- Develop reference check questions, or use the standard ones in Appendix 3. NOTE: The Shared Services Center will conduct the reference checks unless notified otherwise by the hiring manager.
- Review candidate information in advance. Read the resumes and cover letters, as they may help you develop your core interview questions.
- Send any information the candidate may need in advance (e.g., employment application, directive to report to Shared Services Center first, etc.).
- Set aside adequate time for each interview and hold calls/interruptions.
- Organize your note-taking folder. Request assistance from a Shared Services Representative to help keep you organized and to provide support to the process if necessary or when there are several applicants.
- The Equal Opportunity Officer can be a useful resource in developing core interview questions, selection criteria, and/or structuring the interview itself.
- Notify the EEO/AA Office of scheduled dates/times of interviews.
- Establish the interview panel if panel interviews are to be used. Meet with panel members to go over the interview plan and each panelist's role.

Part 3 – During the Interview

A. Pre-employment Inquiries

Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 13:7-1 et seq. (NJ LAD Regulations), there are acceptable and prohibited inquiries of which hiring managers must be aware. These guidelines must be strictly adhered to in order to avoid liability. It should be noted that most statutes, with the exception of the ADA, do not specify information that may not be solicited from applicants. What is important is to ensure that the information that is being solicited is

not sought for discriminatory purposes against protected category persons. In addition, the NJ Law Against Discrimination creates a number of other protected categories beyond those covered under federal statute. Inquiries that directly or indirectly disclose the applicant's race, creed, color, national origin, ancestry, age, sex, marital/civil union status, familial status, affectional or sexual orientation, atypical hereditary cellular or blood trait, genetic information, liability for service in the Armed Forces of the United States, or disability, may constitute evidence of discrimination.

The following is a list of inadvisable inquiries and recommendations on acceptable questions:

Subject Area	Acceptable and Inadvisable Inquiries
Availability for Overtime	<p>Acceptable: Inquiries about an applicant's availability for evening and/or weekend work, provided that the inquiry is made of both male and female applicants and provided that the person now doing the job works evenings and/or weekends, or that a definite change in schedule is being implemented.</p> <p>Inadvisable: Asking this question because you think you may occasionally want the person to work evenings or weekends is not recommended. (Reason: question is likely to have an excessive and therefore discriminatory impact on applicants with families – particularly women.)</p>
Citizenship	<p>Acceptable: Whether the applicant is prevented from lawfully becoming employed in this country because of visa or immigration status. Whether the applicant can provide proof of citizenship, visa, alien registration number after being hired. Note: It's better just to show applicants an I-9 Form and explain that, if hired, they will need to provide documents showing that they can work in the US as required by The Immigration Act.</p> <p>Inadvisable: Whether applicant is a citizen. Any requirement that the applicant present proof of citizenship, visa, alien registration number <i>before</i> being hired. Rejecting any of the documentation deemed acceptable on the I-9 Form.</p>
Credit Inquiries	<p>Acceptable: Few, unless job related. Since this is a tricky area, check with management or the Affirmative Action Office before asking any questions. This criteria will have little effect to no effect on positions at DOP.</p> <p>Inadvisable: Inquiries about charge accounts, bank accounts, etc.</p>
Education	<p>Acceptable: If the individual has the specific education or training required for the specific job.</p> <p>Inadvisable: General questions about high school or college degrees unless you (or your supervisor) can prove the educational degree inquired about is necessary to perform the job. Questions about education dates are also considered age sensitive.</p>

Family Status	<p>Acceptable: Whether applicant has any activities, commitments, or responsibilities that might prevent him or her from meeting work schedules or attendance requirements. Note: These questions must be asked of both men and women or of neither; it is unlawful to ask them only of women or only of men.</p> <p>Inadvisable: Whether the applicant is married/civil union or single (which is simply unlawful in NJ); number and age of children, spouse's/civil union partner's job, spouse's/ civil union partner's or applicant's family responsibilities. Any question asked only of one gender – e.g., asking only women about childcare arrangements. However, some questions that clearly will affect only women are inadvisable even if asked of both men and women applicants.</p>
Financial Status	<p>Acceptable: None</p> <p>Inadvisable: Inquiries about an applicant's financial condition. This has been found to result in discrimination against minorities since minorities on the average have a lower income than whites. Questions about home ownership or car ownership (unless owning a car is required for the job).</p>
Height and Weight	<p>Acceptable: Inquiries about ability to perform the job – without mentioning the applicant's height or weight unless you are able to prove that a specific minimum or maximum height or weight is required to perform the job.</p> <p>Inadvisable: Any inquiry about height or weight that is not based on the actual job requirements.</p>
Marital/Civil Union Status	<p>Acceptable: None</p> <p>Inadvisable: Any questions designed to discover someone's marital/civil union status.</p>
Military	<p>Acceptable: Inquiries about education, training, or related work experience gained in the US Armed Forces.</p> <p>Inadvisable: Type or condition of military discharge.</p>
National Origin	<p>Acceptable: Inquiries into applicant's ability to read, write, and speak English or foreign languages when required for the specific job.</p> <p>Inadvisable: Questions about applicant's lineage, ancestry, national origin, descent, place of birth, or mother tongue, national origin of applicant's parents or spouse. How the applicant acquired the ability to read, write or speak a foreign language.</p>
Organizations	<p>Acceptable: Inquiries about membership in professional organizations related to the job – e.g., does the applicant for a Personnel Assistant job belong to Human Resources or Personnel Executive society?</p> <p>Inadvisable: Questions about organizations whose name or character indicates members' economic or social class, race, color, creed, marital/civil union status, religion or national origin, or sexual orientation – e.g., country clubs, social clubs, religious clubs, fraternal orders.</p>
Personal Information	<p>Acceptable: Whether the applicant has ever worked for your organization. Whether the applicant has ever worked for your organization under another name. Names of character references, if you intend to call upon them.</p> <p>Inadvisable: General inquiries about change of name through</p>

	application in court or marriage.
Pregnancy	Acceptable: Inquiries about the applicant's anticipated duration of stay on the job or anticipated absences – only if made to both male and female applicants. Inadvisable: Any question relating to pregnancy or medical history concerning pregnancy.
Race or Color	Acceptable: None. Inadvisable: Any questions tending to yield information about race or color.
Relatives	Acceptable: Name of applicant's relatives already employed by your organization or competitor. (This inquiry may become unlawful when hiring preference is given to relatives of employees at a time when minorities are considered underrepresented based on a lawful Affirmative Action Plan.) Inadvisable: Requests for the names and addresses of any relatives other than those working for your organization.
Religion or Creed	Acceptable: None. Inadvisable: Questions about availability for overtime or weekend work (see above). Questions about an applicant's religious denomination, religious affiliation, church parish, pastor, or religious holidays observed.
Residence	Acceptable: Inquiries about the applicant's address, needed for future contact with the applicant. Inadvisable: Whether the applicant owns or rents his or her home. Name or relationship of person with whom applicant resides.

B. Pre-employment Inquiries under the ADA

“A qualified individual with a disability is one who meets all the necessary job prerequisites and requirements; and, can perform the essential functions of the job with or without a reasonable accommodation.”

The passage of the ADA introduced a new set of restrictions relative to inquiries that may be legally asked of applicants. The ADA permits employers to ask much more specific questions after an offer of employment has been made.

In the pre-offer stage, disability-related questions are not permitted, nor are questions that are likely to elicit information about a disability. The following examples are provided to assist you in determining what can and cannot be asked of applicants under ADA requirements.

- Employers may ask whether an applicant can perform the job with or without an accommodation. This kind of question is permissible because an appropriate response will most likely be either yes or no. Generally, employers may not ask an

applicant if s/he will need a reasonable accommodation¹ to perform the functions of a job. It is impermissible to ask this question because an appropriate response will most likely cause the applicant to disclose his/her disability. However, if the applicant has made it known that a disability exists and that an accommodation will be required, the employer may ask questions about the accommodation only.

- Employers may ask an applicant to demonstrate how they would perform a job, with or without an accommodation as long as all applicants for the job are asked to do this.
- Employers may ask an applicant whether s/he needs an accommodation for the hiring process.
- Employers may request appropriate documentation of a disability when an applicant requests a reasonable accommodation. NOTE: Such documentation should not be provided to line managers, but should be forwarded to Shared Services for safeguarding.
- Employers may invite applicants to self-disclose a disability for the purposes of the employer's affirmative action recordkeeping. In such cases, the employer must state clearly in writing or orally, that the information is used solely in connection with the affirmative action plan, that disclosure is voluntary, and that any information collected is kept confidential separate from the application, and will not be used in hiring decisions.

C. The Interview

The purpose of the interview is to gather enough information to predict how well a candidate will perform a job, to inform applicants about the job and organization, and to determine the personal chemistry between the hiring manager and the applicant. From the applicant's perspective, the interview is the forum where they can present themselves favorably, where they can collect more information about the job, and where they can test the personal chemistry between themselves and the hiring manager.

Establish a climate conducive to communication exchange. Present your introductory statement to set the applicant at ease. Project a positive image for the agency. Allow the applicant the opportunity to respond to a non-threatening, easy to answer question to promote a more relaxed environment. State the overall purpose and format of the interview. Question, listen, observe and evaluate responses to gather the information you will need to make a hire decision. Tell the applicant what the next steps will be in

¹ "A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to: a job, the work environment, or the way things usually get done that enables a qualified individual with a disability to enjoy an equal employment opportunity."

the selection process and end the interview on a positive note. Be sure to ask if the applicant has any questions of you.

D. Interviewing Techniques

Interviewing techniques are ways of asking questions to encourage candidates to speak openly and freely about topics interviewers want to explore. Topics should represent key areas of qualifications and experience that are essential to performing successfully on the job.

Asking questions effectively will impact on the quality and quantity of information the interviewer is able to obtain from the candidate. Exchanging essential information allows the interviewer to determine if the candidate has the necessary skills and qualifications to be a high performer within the organization.

Ask open-ended questions – these require more than a simple “yes” or “no”.

The one-step probe – is designed to collect a limited amount of basic information. Questions should begin with the words **who**, **what**, **when**, and **where**.

The two-step probe – is designed to examine a candidate’s qualifications in greater depth to obtain more information than provided by a one-step probe. Two-step probes begin with the words **how** and **why**.

Pause or silence – is an interview technique where the interviewer simply pauses or remains silent. The candidate feels uncomfortable with the silence and says more about the current topic of conversation to fill the void.

Comparison and contrast – the interviewer asks the candidate to compare or contrast two or more events or situations. It can provide the interviewer with a great deal of relevant information. For example: how would you compare your job at DHS with your job at Labor?

Problem solving – the interviewer describes a real or hypothetical problem and asks candidates what they would do or how they would solve it. The problem described, ideally, should be one that candidates will actually face on the job for which they are interviewing. As candidates answer problem situation questions, the interviewer should make certain observations, such as:

- How well is the candidate demonstrating their knowledge of the subject?
- How well is the candidate able to apply this knowledge?
- How motivated does the candidate appear to be in finding a solution?
- What is the quality of the solution?

Use of examples – the interviewer asks for examples to support a general statement made by the candidate, or to receive more information about how something was accomplished.

Behavior-based questions – ask questions about past performance and actions taken in various job-related situations. For example, “give me an example of”; “share an experience about”; “what if.”

Negative-based questions – probes for information that will give the interviewer a more balanced understanding of the candidate’s past performance. For example: “That’s fascinating. Was there ever a time when a project didn’t...”

Guided questions – are designed to keep the applicant on track when s/he is too wordy or strays from the topic. For example: “Our time is limited, and I think that we need to move on, don’t you?”

Mirror remarks – are restatements or paraphrases of what was said to clarify a point or get more detailed or additional information. This questioning technique is very effective when used with silence!

Leading questions – provide a signal to the applicant about what the expected or desirable answer is. Usually, the interviewer is unaware that s/he is using a leading question, but they can be very effective for clarifying or gathering more information.

Loaded questions – are designed to evaluate the applicant’s judgment, ability to make decisions, and capacity for dealing with stress when they’ve been put on the spot or are faced with a dilemma. Example: “How would you respond to an employee’s request towhich all employees do, even though it’s not official policy?”

Remember, good listening skills are critical for interviewers. Be sure you’re fully prepared for the interview so that your attention is not divided – make sure the interview area is free from distractions so that you can give the candidate your full attention. Ask your questions in the proper sequence and organize what you hear. Use questions to spur concentration and listen for the meaning behind words. Develop the discipline of concentration. **DO NOT LET PREJUDICE INTERFERE WITH YOUR JUDGMENT!** Avoid preconceptions and personal biases.

Part 4 – After the Interview

It is recommended that after each individual interview, the panelists deliberate while the interview is still fresh in their minds. Even though a discussion will ensue, each panelist should score an individual applicant, based on the approved criteria, as they see fit. In certain circumstances, scoring negotiations may be appropriate.

CAUTION: Interviewer score sheets may be discoverable in a DCR/EEOC or court proceeding. As such, interviewers should avoid making embarrassing, illegal or damaging written remarks on the score sheet.

When the appropriate number of candidates have tentatively been selected for hiring recommendation, the hiring manager should request the Shared Services Center to conduct job reference interviews. Final recommendations for hire should not be made before this step has been completed.

When reference checks have been completed and a final decision reached, the hiring manager must assemble the hiring package. The hiring package consists of: 1) applicant flow data; 2) interview sheet; 3) reference check information; 4) a justification memo; 5) a DPF 697 – Personnel Action Request Form; 6) time and leave report; 7) a STADIS report; 8) in the case of promotions, a DPF 275 – Promotion Recommendation Form; and, DPF 44 – Position Classification Questionnaire. The hiring package must be submitted to the Shared Service Center for processing.

APPENDIX 1 – APPLICANT FLOW FORM

STATUS OF INTERVIEW

(Complete Both Sides)

Unit

Division

Title of Position

Position #

DOP Exam Symbol #

() New Hire RA ()
PA ()
() Promotion PAOC ()

Number of Candidates Interviewed

Location of Position

NAME	GENDER	RACE/ ETHNIC STATUS ¹		RANK ²	REASON FOR SELECTION/NONSELECTION Explain in detail. Use back of form and additional sheets of paper as necessary.
1.					
2.					
3.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					

Name of Interviewer(s)

Date

Phone No.

¹ Race/Ethnic codes are: “B” – Black; “H” – Hispanic; “AI” – American Indian; “A” – Asian; “W” - White

² Per Promotional or Open Competitive List.

Reason for selection / nonselection (cont'd)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

FURTHER COMMENTS: _____

USE ADDITIONAL FORMS AS NECESSARY. THIS FORM IS REQUIRED AND SHOULD ACCOMPANY ALL OTHER REQUIRED PAPERWORK.

APPENDIX 2 – Sample Questions

1. Questions to learn how the applicant regards current to past positions:

- Would you tell me about your present (last) position?
- How would you describe a typical workday?
- What activities did you enjoy most at your last job?
- What do you consider the most critical elements in the successful performance of your present (last) position?
- What do you feel you do best? Why?
- What job functions are the most difficult for you? Why?
- What problems do you encounter on the job? Which frustrate you the most? Why? How do you deal with them?
- What was your greatest contribution in your present (past) position?
- How have you improved your position from the one that you originally accepted?
- How have your previous jobs prepared you for more responsibility?
- What are the reasons you left your last job?
- To what extent do you feel your job progress in the past has been in keeping with your ability?

2. Questions designed to probe how the applicant's relationships and interactions with other people are managed:

- How would you describe your supervisor?
- What do you feel are your supervisor's greatest strengths? Why? Weaknesses? Why?
- In what ways has your supervisor supported your performance?
- For what kinds of things have you been praised? Criticized?
- How would you characterize your coworkers?
- Describe a situation in which you and a coworker had a disagreement and tell me how you handled it.
- How would you describe your relationships with people in other departments?
- What kind of people do you enjoy working with? What kind do you find difficult?
- What do you consider essential in the management of people?
- What type of committees have you worked on? What did you contribute?

3. Questions to explore aspirations:

- What is important to you in a job? What would you like to avoid?
- What do you want from this job that is lacking in your present (past) one?
- What position do you expect to hold five years from now?
- What are you doing to achieve your career goals

4. **Questions to stimulate self-assessment:**

- As an employee, what do you consider your greatest strength?
- In what areas would you most like to improve? Why?
- What motivates you?
- Why did you select this particular field of work?

5. **Questions to determine how the applicant would apply skills, experience and knowledge to the vacant position:**

- What attracts you to the job for which you are applying?
- What do you believe qualifies you for this position?
- What elements of this job would be new to you?
- What additional training do you feel is required to achieve full proficiency?

APPENDIX 3

Reference Check Form

Name of Person Conducting Reference Check _____

Date of Reference Check Call _____

Name and Title of Person Responding _____

Supervisor? _____ **Other** _____

Applicant's Name _____

Sample Opening: "Hello, I'm _____ from the NJ Department of Personnel. We recently interviewed _____ for a (ex.) Personnel Trainee position and you were given as a reference. Would you mind answering a few questions regarding this candidate?"

Question 1:

Is/Was _____ **employed with your organization?** Yes _____ No _____

If yes, for how long? _____

Question 2:

How would you rate the candidate in the following areas:

- a) **Individual demonstrates ability to meet deadlines?** Yes _____ No _____
- b) **Individual shows initiative?** Agree _____ Disagree _____
- c) **Individual works well on an independent basis?** Agree _____ Disagree _____
- d) **Individual is willing to take on new responsibilities?** Agree _____ Disagree _____

Question 3:

Would you rehire this individual? Yes _____ No _____

Note: If the reference is a personal one, the questions should read as follows:

Question 1:

How long have you known this individual? _____

Question 2:

To the best of your knowledge, is this individual a person who:

- a) **Demonstrates the ability to meet deadlines?** Agree _____ Disagree _____
- b) **Shows initiative?** Agree _____ Disagree _____
- c) **Is willing to take on new responsibilities?** Agree _____ Disagree _____